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Freedom as ethical
postulate



FREEDOM AS ETHICAL POSTULATE

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FREEDOM AS ETHICAL POSTULATE.

THE problem of the "Freedom of the Will" is described by Professor Paulsen, in his treatise on Ethics, published two years ago, as "a problem which arose under certain conditions, and has disappeared with the disappearance of these conditions, a problem which exists only for a theological or scholastic philosophy."¹ Professor Paulsen is not alone in thus relegating the question to the region of metaphysical antiquities. Leading ethical writers among ourselves agree with him in considering this "most contentious question" as one with which Ethics, at any rate, need not concern itself. Among others, Professor Sidgwick (especially in the earlier editions of his 'Methods of Ethics'), as well as Mr Leslie Stephen and other Evolutionists, share this view of the

¹ Ethik, I. 661.

question. I venture to differ from these authors, and will endeavour in this essay to show the living and paramount ethical interest of the problem of freedom. It is, I think, one of the central questions of philosophy, which can never become obsolete. Its form may change, but the question itself remains, like all the deepest questions, to be dealt with by each succeeding age in its own way.

For us, as for Kant, the question of freedom takes the form of a deep-seated antithesis between the interests of the scientific or intellectual consciousness on the one hand, and the moral and religious convictions of mankind on the other.

✓ From the scientific or theoretical point of view, man must regard himself as part of a totality of things, animals, and persons. In the eyes of science, "human nature" is a part of the universal "nature of things"; man's life is a part of the wider life of the universe itself. The universal Order can admit of no real exceptions; what *seems* exceptional must cease to be so in the light of advancing knowledge. This, its fundamental postulate, science is constantly verifying. Accordingly, when science—psychological and physiological, as well as physical—attacks the problem of human life, it immediately proceeds to break down man's

imagined independence of nature, and seeks to demonstrate his entire dependence. The scientific doctrine now prefers, indeed, to call itself by the "fairer name" of Determinism; but if it has the courage of its convictions, it will acknowledge the older and truer name of Necessity. For though the forces which bind man are primarily the inner forces of motive and disposition and established character, yet between these inner forces and the outer forces of nature there can be no real break. The force, outer and inner, is ultimately one; "human nature" is part of the "nature of things." The original source of man's activity lies therefore without rather than within himself; for the outer force is the larger and the stronger, and includes the inner. I get my "nature" by heredity from "Nature" herself, and, once got, it is further formed by force of circumstances and education. All that *I* do is to react—as any plant or even stone does also in its measure—on the influences which act upon me. Such action and reaction, together, yield the whole series of occurrences which constitute my life. I, therefore, am not free (as Determinists are apt to insist that I am, though my will is determined); "motives" are, after all, external forces operating upon my "nature," which responds to them, and

over neither "motive" nor "nature" have *I* any control. I am constrained by the necessity of nature—its law is mine; and thus Determinism really means Constraint. The necessity that entwines my life is conceived, it is true, rather as an inner than as an outer necessity; but the outer and the inner necessity are seen, in their ultimate analysis, to be one and the same. The necessity that governs our life is "a magic web woven through and through us, like that magnetic system of which modern science speaks, penetrating us with a network subtler than our subtlest nerves, yet bearing in it the central forces of the world."¹

The distinction between the new Determinism and the old Necessitarianism has been finally invalidated, so far as science is concerned, by the scientific conception of Evolution. Science now insists upon regarding man, like all else, as an evolved product; and evolution must ultimately be regarded as, in its very nature, one and continuous. The scientific or modern fashion of speaking of a man's life as the result of certain "forces," into which it is the business of the biographer and historian to resolve him, is no mere fashion of speech. In literal truth, the individual is, to the

¹ Mr Pater, in 'The Renaissance.'

view of science, the child of his age and circumstances, and impotent as a child in their hands. The scientific explanation of human life and character is the exhibition of them as taking their place among the other products of cosmical evolution. In our day, accordingly, it is no longer "scientific" to recognise such a break as Mill, following Edwards's hint, insisted upon, between outward "constraint" and inward "determination." All the interests of the scientific ambition are bound up with the denial of Freedom in any and every sense of the word; its admission means embarrassment to the scientific consciousness, and the surrender of the claim of science to finality in its view of human life.

With the assertion of freedom, on the other hand, are as undeniably bound up all the interests of the moral and religious consciousness; Kant's saying still holds, that freedom is the postulate of morality. The moral consciousness dissolves at the touch of such scientific "explanation" as I have just referred to. The determinist may try to prop it up, and to construct a pseudo-morality on the basis of necessity; but the attempt is doomed to failure. The living throbbing experience of the moral man,—remorse and retribution, approbation and reward, all the grief and humilia-

tion of his life, all its joy and exaltation, imply a deep and ineradicable conviction that his destiny, if partly shaped for him by a Power beyond himself, is yet, in its grand outline, in his own hands, to make it or to mar it, as he will. As man cannot, without ceasing to be man, escape the imperative of duty, so he cannot surrender his freedom and become a child of nature. All the passion of his moral experience gathers itself up in the conviction of his infinite and eternal superiority to Nature: she "cannot do otherwise," he *can*. Engulfed in the necessity of nature, he could still conceive himself as "living" the life of nature, or a merely animal life, but no longer as living the proper and characteristic life of man. That is a life rooted in the conviction of its freedom; for it is not a life, like nature's, "according to law," but a life "according to the representation of law," or in free obedience to a consciously conceived ideal.

It is the task of philosophy to resolve this antithesis, to heal the apparent breach between the scientific and the moral consciousness, to mediate between their seemingly rival claims and interests. Various philosophical solutions are possible. It may be that the scientific (which is here the

psychological) view is the only available "explanation" of human life. Should that be so, freedom would be lost so far as knowledge is concerned. We might still, of course, adopt the agnostic attitude, and say that the ultimate or noumenal reality is here, as elsewhere, unknowable. But to insist upon the finality and adequacy of the scientific or psychological view is to pass beyond science, and to take up a philosophical or metaphysical position. The philosophical proof of freedom, therefore, must be the demonstration of the inadequacy of the categories of science: its philosophical disproof must be the demonstration of the adequacy of such scientific categories. In the words of Mr Shadworth Hodgson, "Either liberty is true, and then the categories are insufficient; or the categories are sufficient, and then liberty is a delusion." Such a determination of the sufficiency or insufficiency of scientific categories is the business of philosophy as universal "critic." A negative as well as a positive vindication of freedom, therefore, is possible—the former by the condemnation of the categories of science as insufficient, the latter by the provision of higher and sufficient categories for its explanation. Even if such higher categories should not be forthcoming, and we should

find ourselves unable to formulate a theory of Freedom, or to categorise the moral life, we might still vindicate its possibility.

That the question of freedom is ultimately a metaphysical one, is indicated by the fact that all deterministic theories base themselves, either explicitly or implicitly, upon a definite metaphysic. The denial of individual freedom is, for instance, the obvious corollary of such a pantheistic metaphysic as Spinoza's. Human personality being resolved into the all-comprehending Divine Nature, from the necessity of which all things, without exception, follow, man's conception of his freedom and of his resulting importance as an "imperium in imperio" is explained away as an illusion of his ignorance, destined to disappear in an "adequate" knowledge of the universe. The consequence is strictly logical. If I am not a person, but merely an "aspect" or "expression" of the universe or God, I cannot be free. The life of the universe is mine also: freedom can be predicated of God alone.

Materialism, again, carries with it the same ethical consequence. If matter is everything, and spirit merely its last and most complex manifestation, once more freedom is an illusion. Freedom means spiritual independence; and if

spirit is the mere product of matter, its life cannot in the end escape the bondage of material law.

The evolutionary metaphysic, whether of the biological or of the mechanical type, also obviously binds its adherents to the denial of freedom. Moral life is interpreted either as a series of adjustments of the individual to his environment, or as a series of balancings of equilibrium. In neither case is room left for freedom, or a "new beginning."

In such cases as those just indicated, the connection of the interpretation of human life with the general metaphysical theory is obvious enough. The connection is not so obvious, and has not been generally remarked, in the case of the "psychological" theory of Determinism. The theory has been generally studied in the form given to it by Mill, and even in that form the parallel between the metaphysical sensationalism and the ethical determinism is easily detected. The theory was originally stated, however, by Hume, and its logical dependence upon his philosophical empiricism or sensationalism is no less evident. If "I" am resolvable into the series of my conscious states; if "I" am merely the bundle or mass of sensations and appetites, desires, affections, and passions which constitute my "ex-

perience"; if, in short, my existence is entirely phenomenal,—then the phenomena which *are* "me" can be accounted for, or refunded into their antecedents, like any other phenomena which *are* "animals" or "things." ✓

Here, then, emerges the sole possibility of a metaphysical vindication of freedom—namely, in another than the Humian, empirical, or "psychological" account of the moral Person or Self. The nature of the self is a metaphysical question, and must be investigated as such; it is not to be taken for granted on the empirical or sensationist side. There is another alternative account, the transcendental or idealistic—viz., that the self, so far from being equivalent to the sum of its particular experiences or "feelings," is their permanent subject and presupposition. Thus the central problem of morality is seen to be, like the central problem of knowledge, the nature and function of the self. We have to choose between an empirical and a transcendental solution of both problems. Here, more particularly, we have to consider whether, in the sphere of our moral experience, Kant has "answered Hume."

Kant's "answer" consists, as is well known, in

the withdrawal of freedom from the phenomenal to the noumenal world. Conceding to Hume and his followers that the phenomenal Ego is determined, that its life is subject to the necessity of nature, Kant still maintains that the true or noumenal Ego, the Ego-in-itself, which we can never "know," but which we must "think" as, in its pure rationality, self-legislative and self-obedient, since it exists apart from sensibility, is free from the dominion of its necessity.

Now it is obvious, without further exposition, that this theory does not vindicate actual freedom. Here, as elsewhere, Kant so presses the distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal as to make the distinction absolute. In my noumenal nature, or in myself, I am free; in my empirical or phenomenal states, I am not free, but under the necessity of nature. This is hardly better, as M. Fouillée has remarked,¹ than to tell a prisoner that *outside his prison* there is freedom, and that he has only to *think* himself outside, to realise that he is free. We are confined within the prison-house of desire and passion, of sensibility and motive force, and the only life we know is that of prisoners. What matters it to us that there is freedom if we cannot make it our

¹ 'L'Evolutionnisme des Idées-Forces,' Introd. 76.

own? But escape we cannot, without ceasing to be men; our very manhood is our prison-house.

But, it may be urged, the Kantian freedom is the true freedom after all, inasmuch as, though not actual, it is yet the ideal or goal towards which the moral man is always approximating. But even regarded as an ideal, it is but a one-sided freedom, as the life of duty which realises it is but a one-sided life. For, according to Kant's view, man is free only in so far as he acts rationally or without impulse of sensibility: in so far as he acts from impulse or even with impulse, he acts irrationally, and is not free. But freedom, if it is to have any moral significance, must mean freedom in choosing the evil equally with the good; only such a double freedom can be regarded as the basis of responsibility or obligation. Freedom is that which makes evil evil, as it is that which makes good good.

If freedom is to be of real moral significance, it must be realised in the concrete life of motivated activity, in the apparent necessity of nature, which is thereby converted into the mechanism of freedom; not apart from this actual life of man, in a life of sheer passionless reason, which is not human life as we know it. By withdrawing it from the sphere of nature and mechanism, of

feeling and impulse, and constituting for it a purely rational sphere of its own, Kant has reduced freedom to a mere abstraction. What is left is the form of the moral life without its content. The content of human freedom can only be that life of nature and mechanism, of feeling and impulse, which Kant excludes as irrational. The self in whose freedom we feel an interest because it is *our* self, is the self that rejoices and suffers, that is tempted and falls, that agonises also and overcomes, this actual human self and not another—a self of pure reason, which, if indeed it is the ideal self, must remain for man, as we know him, a mere ideal.

For, in truth, that so-called “other” or ideal self is, after all, an unreality, just in so far as it is another or ideal self, and attains reality only in so far as it coincides with the actual self or the actual self with it. So far as man is concerned, it is simply the potential self of goodness which, in the good man, is ever passing into actuality; it is simply the ideal, of which the good life is the progressive realisation. But, if Kant’s view be true, freedom is lost in the very act of its realisation. It “never is, but always is to be.” The ethical process is suicidal; the goal, so soon as reached, turns out to be illusory. The effort

to escape the dominion of necessity is as futile as the attempt to escape from one's own shadow. The moral man casts the shadow of his chains before him, and when he thinks to throw them off, he is but riveting them anew.

The only positive meaning which we can put into Kant's theory of freedom, its only bearing upon moral reality, is that not man but God is free. If God is conceived as pure reason energising, we may admit that, for such a Being, Kant has vindicated freedom. But so far as man's life is concerned, he has, at best, given a merely negative vindication, in his proof that morality implies a freedom which we cannot know, and in his resulting disproof of the adequacy or finality of the scientific interpretation of human life. In other words, Kant has shown that, here as elsewhere, beyond the facts which science discovers lies their real meaning, of which the phenomena are but the outer shell. The kernel of man's life is Autonomy; since he finds his end within himself, the law of his life must come from the depths of his own nature. And just in so far as he obeys this self-imposed law, which "represents" to him himself, is it given to him to lay hold on, and practically to realise, a freedom which he may not hope to understand.

Yet, while Kant's main contribution to the solution of the problem of human freedom may be described as negative rather than positive, the importance of that contribution is not to be under-estimated. His limitation of the scientific category of Causality to the world of phenomena is most important. At the heart of morality as of knowledge, Kant finds the active Subject or Ego, like the spider in his web; and as the spider is not snared in the web of his own weaving, neither is the Ego, intellectual and moral, in the world of its own creation. It is this central and constant activity of the Ego that is the real guarantee of its freedom. The subject cannot come under the dominion of categories which are its own expression, the means by which it constructs a physical and a moral world of objects out of the unmeaning data of sense and feeling. Itself the author of the lower order of nature, as well as of the higher order of morality, it cannot lose the latter in the former, or itself in either.

The problem still remains, to give a positive vindication of freedom, to penetrate its transcendental secret, and to show not merely *that*, but *how* man is free. Such an attempt is made by the Neo-Hegelian School who, here as else-

where, seek to substitute for Kantian abstractions a concrete view, and to find the noumenal in the phenomenal, the ideal in the actual. The true moral self, like the true intellectual self, it is maintained, does not hide itself behind the order it creates; it reveals itself in that order, as its immanent and constitutive principle. It is only necessary here to refer the reader to Green's splendid vindication of this function of the self in the building up of moral experience, and of its freedom in the exercise of that function.¹ The moral life, Green conclusively proves, is not properly described as a conflict of motives which, as external forces, act upon the self, a conflict in which the strongest motive survives. It is not even to be conceived as a conflict in which the self intervenes to make the strongest motive. All strength, all motive force, really comes from the self which, by its activity, first constitutes the motive. So far is the self from being a mere inert something, acted upon by influences from without, that only through its reaction upon the want or stimulus does the latter become a motive or object of desire. Kant's two "worlds" or two

¹ Prolegomena to Ethics, Bk. II. The parallel between the intellectual and the moral activity of the self is strikingly enforced by Professor Laurie in his companion volumes, 'Metaphysica Nova et Vetus' and 'Ethica.'

“points of view” remain, therefore, no longer apart and equally valid; his “foreign determining causes” (motives or impulses) are seen to be not really “foreign” to the Ego, but its own creation, so that, in being determined by them, it is after all self-determined. The scientific or psychological view is now seen to have been abstract and provisional; the metaphysical is seen to be alone concrete and final.

The issue between Freedom and Necessity becomes now very clear. It resolves itself into the question: Has Hegel (or Green) “answered Hume”? I have already pointed out that the question of freedom resolves itself ultimately into a conflict between two alternative views of the moral self—viz., the empirical and the transcendental. If, on the one hand, the self is resolvable into its phenomenal states, if these exhaust its nature, the case for freedom is lost; for these states determine and are determined by one another in the unbroken nexus of antecedent and consequent. If, on the other hand, such a resolution of the self into its successive experiences is impossible, if moral experience presupposes at each stage the presence and operation of a permanent self, the case for freedom is made good. That the latter, and not the former, is the true statement of the case, has,

I think, been finally proved by the transcendental analysis of experience. It is still possible, of course, to rest in the scientific or psychological view of moral activity ; one may not be prepared to adopt the transcendental standpoint, and may fall back upon the psychological or empirical view, as more in accordance with "common-sense." Moral, like intellectual scepticism, and even agnosticism, are still, even after Kant and Hegel, intelligible attitudes of thought. But unless it is shown that the scientific or psychological is the final and adequate or metaphysical view ; unless, that is, the whole self is resolved into its several states or its "experience," — freedom is not disproved. Now, such an empirical resolution of the self is as impossible in the moral as in the intellectual sphere ; the phenomenal or empirical view, *when offered as a metaphysic*, is at once seen to be abstract and inadequate. To understand or think out the moral, equally with the intellectual life, we must regard the former as, like the latter, the product of the activity of the Ego. That activity is the heart and centre of the process, from which alone its real nature is recognised. Neither the moral nor the intellectual man can be resolved into his "experience." *It implies him ; for, quâ* "experience," it is not a mere series or sum of

“states,” but the gathering up of these in the continuous and single life of an identical self. Motive, circumstance, temperament, character—the several stones of the determinist structure—all imply such an activity of the self, if they are to enter as factors into the moral situation. And the self which is shown to be the source of this original formative activity is thereby proved to be free.

But the further question will not be laid—What of this all-important “self”? What, and whence is it? And if the biological and mechanical evolutionists, refusing to regard the individual self as ultimate and self-explaining, trace it to a past beyond itself, and see in it the highly complex resultant of vast cosmic forces, the Absolute Idealist of the Neo-Hegelian type, believing as he does in the evolution of divine reason in the universe, finds in the life of the self the manifestation or reproduction in time of the eternal Self-consciousness of God. Now, such an account of the self appears to me to deprive us of freedom just when it seems within our grasp. If I am but the vehicle of the divine self-manifestation, if, *in myself*, in my own proper self-hood or personality, I am nothing, it is illusory to talk of my freedom.

God may reveal Himself in me in another way than He does in the world ; but my life is, after all, only His in a fuller manifestation, a higher stage, really as necessary as any of the lower, in the realisation of the divine nature. Such a view, like the Kantian, may conserve the freedom of God ; it inevitably invalidates that of man. If man can be said to be free at all, it is only in so far as he is identical with God. If it be contended that just here is found our true self-hood, and with it our real freedom, I submit that this view of the self means the loss of self-hood in any true sense of the term, since it means the resolution of man and his freedom as elements into the life of God, the single so-called "Self." Thus freedom is ultimately resolved by the Transcendentalists into a higher necessity, as it is resolved by the Naturalists into a lower necessity : by the former it is resolved into the necessity of God, as by the latter it is resolved into the necessity of Nature. Hegelianism, like Spinozism, has no place for the personality of man, and his proper life as man. Equally with Naturalism, such an Absolute Idealism makes of man a mere term in the necessary evolution of the universe, a term which, though higher, is no less necessary in its sequence than the lower terms of the evolution.

It may be that the doctrine is true, and that "necessity is the true freedom." But let us understand that the freedom belongs to God, the necessity to man; the freedom to the whole, the necessity to the parts. Such a Transcendentalism, equally with Naturalism, also and at the same time invalidates the distinction between good and evil, resolving apparent evil into real good, and seeing things *sub specie æternitatis* as "all very good." The reality of moral distinctions is bound up with the reality of personal freedom; freedom is just the consciousness of moral alternative. Transcendental Optimism, therefore, as Professor James remarks, finally "turns to an ethical indifference." To sum up this criticism in a word, the reality of freedom is bound up with the integrity of the moral personality. If I am a person, an "Ego on my own account," I am free; if I am not such a person or Ego, I am not free. And I may be de-personalised either into Nature or into God.

It would seem, then, that the only possible vindication of freedom is to take our stand on the moral self or personality, as itself the heart and centre of the moral life, the key to the moral situation. Whenever we try to "account for"

the self, the result is that we lose it; the very attempt to grasp and define it seems destined to destroy it. May it not be that the question of the *origin* of self-hood is itself unphilosophical? May not personality be an ultimate term in philosophical explanation? Is not the question, Whence the self? a question of the same kind as that of the child who, when told that God made everything, still asks, "But who made God?" Do we not here reach the ultimate in philosophical explanation? Must we not so conceive the universe as to admit, in all the fulness of its moral and intellectual significance, the fact of personality? May not the conception, instead of being secondary and derivative, and therefore reducible to others more primary, be central and ultimate even for philosophy?

Whatever may be the case with the intellectual problem, the facts which we call "moral," the supreme facts of our human experience, do, as Kant insisted, demand such reference to a freely acting personality. The grand characteristic of the moral life of man, which forbids its resolution into the life either of Nature or of God, is Responsibility or Obligation. This is more than expectation of "punishment," to which Mill would reduce it. It is rather punishability, desert of punishment or

of reward. The element of "retribution," instead of being accidental, is essential to the conception. In the common human experience of remorse there is implied the conviction that different possibilities of action were open, and therefore that the agent is accountable for what he did : accountable not necessarily *in foro externo*, human or divine, but primarily and inevitably to himself, to the inner tribunal of his own nature in its varied possibilities. And retribution comes, if not from without, yet with sure and certain foot from within. Our moral nature, in its high possibilities, is inexorable in its demands and relentless in its penalties for failure to satisfy them. To say that the actual and the possible in human life are, in the last analysis, identical, to resolve the "ought to be" into the "is," would be to falsify the healthy moral consciousness of mankind.

On the other hand, the admission of the full claim of that consciousness may mean the surrender of metaphysical completeness in our scheme of the universe. For it means the recognition of a spiritual "force," different in kind from the natural or mechanical, and therefore the surrender of a materialistic Monism or a "scientific" synthesis. It means also the recognition of a plu-

reality of spiritual "forces," and therefore the surrender of a spiritual or idealistic Monism. It may even mean, as Professor James insists that it does, the entire abandonment of the monistic point of view, or the conception of a "block-universe." The admission of free personality may cleave the universe asunder, and leave us with a seemingly helpless "pluralism" in place of the various "monisms" of metaphysical theory. Such an admission means further the recognition of evil, real and positive, alongside of good in the universe. It may therefore mean the surrender of optimism, philosophical and religious, or at any rate force us to pass to it through the "strait gate" of pessimism. All this darkness and difficulty may result to metaphysics from the recognition and candid concession of the demands of the moral consciousness. Nor will this seem strange when we remember that the moral problem of freedom is just the problem of personality itself, which cannot but prove a stone of stumbling to every metaphysical system—

"Dark is the world to thee; *thyself* art the reason why;
For is He not all but thou, that hast power to feel 'I am I'?"

Recognising these difficulties, and regarding them as insuperable, we may still accept freedom as

the ethical postulate, as the hypothesis, itself inexplicable, upon which alone morality becomes intelligible. This is the "moral method," which some living thinkers share with Kant. Professor Campbell Fraser has called it the standpoint of "moral faith."¹ The method or standpoint has received a brilliant exposition and defence from Professor William James, in a lecture delivered at Harvard on "The Dilemma of Determinism."² "I for one," says the latter writer, "feel as free to try the conception of moral as of mechanical or of logical reality. . . . If a certain formula for expressing the nature of the world violates my moral demand, I shall feel as free to throw it overboard, or at least to doubt it, as if it disappointed my demand for uniformity of sequence, for example." Insisting upon the "integrity of our moral" as well as of our intellectual judgments, and especially upon that of the "judgment of regret," and upon the equal legitimacy of the "postulate of moral" with that of "physical coherence," Professor James thus states his conclusion: "While I freely admit that the pluralism and restlessness [of a universe with freedom in it]

¹ Cf. his 'Berkeley' in "Philosophical Classics," last chapter.

² Published in the 'Unitarian Review,' September 1884 (Boston, U.S.A.)

are repugnant and irrational in a certain way, I find that the alternative to them is irrational in a deeper way. The indeterminism offends only the native absolutism of my intellect—an absolutism which, after all, perhaps deserves to be snubbed and kept in check. But the determinism . . . violates my sense of moral reality through and through."

Now, such a solution of the problem of freedom is, to say the very least, a plausible one; but let us note exactly what it means. It recognises and gives a new emphasis to the Kantian antithesis between the intellectual or scientific consciousness on the one hand, and the moral and religious on the other; and the solution offered consists in an assertion of the rights of the latter along with and even in precedence of those of the former. The decision in favour of freedom is thus a kind of "moral wager," as M. Renouvier has well called it; the odds seem to be on the side of morality, and therefore the odds are taken. And probably the question is generally answered on some such grounds, though not so explicitly formulated. The philosopher is the man, after all; and the *stress* is laid on the one side of the question or the other, according to the temper of the individual. One man feels more keenly the disappointment of

his moral expectation. Another feels more keenly the disappointment of his intellectual or scientific ambition. For the ethical and the scientific temper are not generally found in equal proportions in the same man. As men are born Platonists or Aristotelians, so are they born moralists or intellectualists, men of practice or men of theory ; and this original bent of nature will generally determine a man's attitude to such an ultimate question. While the "intellectualists" will, with Spinoza, ruthlessly sacrifice freedom to completeness and finality of speculative view, the "moralists" will be content, with Kant and Lotze, to "recognise this theoretically indemonstrable freedom as 'a postulate of the practical reason.'" The latter position, if it confessedly falls short of knowledge, is at any rate entitled to the name which it claims for itself, that of a "rational faith" ; it is a faith grounded in the moral or practical reason. Since man must live, whether he can ever *know how* he lives or not, freedom may well be accepted as the postulate or axiom of human life. If moral experience implies freedom, or even the idea of freedom, as its condition ; if man is so constituted that he can act only *under the idea of freedom*, or *as if* he were free, then the *onus probandi* surely lies with the Determinist. It is for him to

make good his libel upon human nature, that it is the constant dupe of such deep delusion ; as it is for the agnostic to make good that other libel of the mere relativity of human knowledge.

But, while fully recognising the merits of this "moral method," and, above all, the intellectual candour which it expresses, must we not seek to establish freedom upon some higher and yet more stable ground ? Kant's antithesis still remains. Can it not be overcome ? Is it not possible to exhibit the unity of the intellectual and moral judgments, and thus to eliminate the subjective element which seems to cling to the solution just referred to ? We, and our life, moral as well as intellectual and physical, are after all part of one reality ; moral reality and physical reality are elements of a real universe. The moral consciousness is the consciousness or expression — one among other expressions, conscious and unconscious—of the universe itself.¹ It is objective as well as subjective ; you cannot detach the moral subject and his consciousness from the universe in which he finds his place and life. The conception of Duty or Oughtness, with its implicate of freedom, is not an artificial product, a foreign importation into the universe ; it is a *natural*

¹ Cf. M. Fouillée, 'L'Avenir de la Métaphysique,' 262 ff.

exponent of the universe itself, and therefore we must interpret the universe in its light. Whatever the difficulties which the moral consciousness may raise for the metaphysical intellect, it is of right, and not of favour or of choice, that its utterance is heard. It, too, is the voice of reason—the voice of the universal reality or “nature of things”; and the Determinism that would choke its utterance or treat it as illusion and “pious fraud,” is a libel not only upon human nature, but upon the universe itself. The breach between our intellectual and our moral judgments can be only apparent, not real or permanent. Must we not then continue the effort to achieve their reconciliation, and to understand Freedom in its relation to so-called Necessity? Let us revise both conceptions once more, to discover whether such a reconciliation is still possible.

It has always been an ambition with the Determinists to show that there is no real controversy in the case, that all the difficulty has arisen from a misunderstanding of the terms employed on either side, and that Necessity, rightly understood, does not exclude Freedom, rightly understood. This “reconciling project” is as old as Edwards, with his distinction of the free *man*

and the determined *will*; but its greatest advocate is Hume.¹ One of its latest and not least persuasive advocates is Mr Shadworth Hodgson, who insists² that "the true and proper meaning of *Freedom* is freedom as opposed to *compulsion*; and the true and proper meaning of *Necessity* is necessity as opposed to *contingency*. Thus, freedom being opposed to compulsion, and necessity to contingency, there is no antithetical opposition between freedom and necessity." Determinism maintains the uniformity of nature, or necessity, as opposed to contingency, not to freedom; and accordingly "a determinist is perfectly at liberty to maintain the freedom of the will." Accordingly, while "indeterminism imagines a freedom apart from necessity . . . necessity is the inseparable condition, or rather let us say *co-element*, of freedom. And without that co-element, freedom is as incapable of being construed to thought, is something as impossible as walking without ground to tread on, or flying without air to beat."³ This, Mr Hodgson further maintains, is the only freedom that interests the ordinary man. "By freedom, whether of the will or anything else, men at large mean freedom from com-

¹ 'Enquiry concerning Human Understanding,' sect. viii.

² 'Mind,' vi. 111.

³ 'Mind,' v. 252.

pulsion. What know they, or care they, about uniformity of nature, or predestination, or reign of law?" The ordinary man holds both ideas together—the idea of Freedom (= non-compulsion) and the idea of Necessity (= uniformity) of actions; he realises no contradiction, as in reality there is none, between them. The debate is between the philosophers themselves, and has its source in the ambiguity of the term "Necessity." This has been conceived dynamically, or as a force,—a misunderstanding which has arisen from carrying over the metaphorical idea of "law" into scientific and philosophical thought. In reality, whether applied to human activity or to the phenomena of nature, "law" means simply "uniformity." But while "law" is thus the merest "abstraction, and incapable of operating as an entity," it has been hypostatized not merely as the agent in the occurrences of nature, but also as the agent in the process of human activity.

In such argumentation one can hardly help suspecting a certain sleight of hand; one can hardly believe that a debate of this kind is altogether a war of words. And one cannot but note that such an evaporation of the debate into the thin air of pure verbiage is always equivalent to its settlement in favour of Determinism. The

interpretation of "Necessity," suggested in the sentences just quoted from Mr Hodgson, is interesting and significant. It indicates that the complexion of the question has changed considerably since the classical presentation of it by Edwards. Determinism no longer takes the "high priori" road of the older Necessitarians ; it is now content to follow the humbler path of "scientific method." Hume has, once for all, emptied the conception of Necessity, for the scientific mind, and for the mind of the empiricist in philosophy, of all suggestion of mystery and force ; and it would seem that the mere "uniformity" which is left is a very innocent affair, and quite consistent with freedom. Yet I cannot think that this is the case. "Non-compulsion" is certainly one element in the notion of freedom, but it is not the whole notion. If it were, man could be called free only in a sense in which nature is also free. For, as we have just seen, Necessity has no dynamical content even in the sphere of natural occurrences ; the "laws of nature" are simply the uniformities which characterise the behaviour of bodies. But there is, as Professor James insists, an additional and no less essential element in the notion of freedom—viz., the element of "contingency" or "chance." Absolute uniformity would be, no less

than compulsion, the negation of freedom. But I submit that absolute uniformity has not been proved of human activity. In order to its establishment, all the elements of the action must be known and observed as its phenomenal factors; but *the* source of the action cannot be thus phenomenalised. Determinism, even on this improved rendering of it, gives a mere dissection or anatomy of the action. Under its analysis, the living whole of the action itself is dissolved into its dead elements; the constitutive synthetic principle of life is wanting. That principle is the self, or moral personality, to which the action must be referred if we would see it as a whole and from within. No element of a moral situation is strictly calculable, because each is but an element in the life of the self; and to eliminate the element of contingency from its life would be to destroy its freedom.

At the same time, this paring down of Necessity to mere Uniformity is a certain contribution to the solution of our problem. While the advocates of freedom, instead of giving up the element of contingency, must continue to contend for a power of free and incalculable initiation in the self, we can yet see how the life of freedom may be realised in the midst of mechanical uni-

formity; how it may, so to speak, annex the latter, and use it in its own interests. In a narrower sense Necessity, interpreted as Uniformity, may be called "the co-element of freedom." As Lotze says: "Freedom itself, in order that it may even be thought of as being what it aims at being, postulates a very widely extended, although not an exclusive, prevalence of the law of causation." But, if freedom is to be saved, the causal uniformity must not be all-inclusive; it must not include the moral self. Uniformity or mechanism may be instrumental, an organic element in the life of the self; but the supreme category of that life is freedom.

The preceding considerations make necessary a final revision of the conception of freedom itself, with a view to its more exact definition, and, it may be, limitation. Freedom means, we have just seen, contingency; but it does not therefore mean mere and absolute indefiniteness or caprice. Certain lines are laid down for each man, in his inner "nature" and outward circumstances, along which to develop a "character." A man has not the universal field of possibilities to himself; each has his own moral "sphere." This is determined for him, it is the "given" element in his life.

Two factors, an internal and an external, contribute to such determination. The internal factor is the "nature," "disposition," or "temperament," psychological and physiological, which constitutes his initial equipment for the moral life. The external factor consists in the "force of circumstance," the places and opportunities of his life, what is often called his "environment," physical and social. So far there is determination; so far the field of his activity is defined for each man. But unless out of these two factors, the external and the internal, you can construct the moral man, room is still left for freedom. Its "sphere" may be determined; the specific form and complexion of the moral task may be different for each and determined for each. But the moral alternative lies within this sphere. All that is necessary to constitute it is the possibility for the man of good or evil, not of any or every particular form of good and evil. They may take any form, and what form they shall take is determined *for* the individual, not *by* him. But the choice between the alternatives is essentially the same in all cases; it is a choice between good and evil, and that choice belongs to the individual. Inner "nature" and outward "circumstances" are, as it were, a raw material out of which he

has to *create* a moral character—a plastic material which, like the sculptor, he has to subdue to his own formative idea.

The grand moral limitation is individuality. It is just because we are individuals that the moral ideal takes a different complexion for each of us, and that no man's moral task is exactly like his brother's. Yet, amid all the variety of detail, the grand outlines of the task remain the same for all. In its very nature that task is universal; and though it must be realised in a variety of concrete particulars, it *may* be realised in *any* and in all particulars, without losing its universal significance. For each man there is an ideal, an ought-to-be; for each man there is the same choice, with the same momentous meaning, between good and evil. To each there is set fundamentally the same task—out of “nature” and “circumstance”—the equipment given and the occasion offered, to create a character. For character is a creation, as the statue is, though, like the statue, it implies certain given materials. What, in detail, character shall be, *in what way* good and *in what way* evil, depends upon the “given” elements of nature and circumstance; *whether* it shall be good *or* evil depends upon the man himself. Out of the plastic material to

create a character, formed after the pattern of the heavenly beauty, that is the peculiar human task. Is not the material of the moral life essentially plastic? Out of the most unpromising material have we not often seen surprising moral creations? Just when the task seemed hardest, and came nearest to being impossible, have we not sometimes seen the highest fulfilments of it? And with the most promising material do we not often see conspicuous moral failure? Must we not admit that success or failure here is determined ultimately not by the material, but by the free play of the energy of the self?

But the conception of freedom needs still more exact definition. The freedom of moral life is not of that abstract and absolute kind for which Libertarians have generally contended. Moral freedom—that is, the freedom which morality implies and moral experience illustrates—is not freedom in each and every act of the life, but freedom *on the whole*. Freedom of initiative is implied, but it does not follow that all the actions of the life are cases of such free initiation. The recognition of this further limitation of freedom is important for the proper understanding of the whole question. In three different aspects, at

least, we find such a limitation (which is not equivalent to negation) of freedom.

(1.) The principle of economy of spiritual force implies the surrender of large tracts of our life to mechanism. Such a surrender is made in the case not only of purely physical activities, but also generally in the case of the routine of daily life. To deliberate and choose about such things as which boot we shall put on first, or which side of the garden walk we shall take, is an entirely gratuitous assertion of our freedom: it is the mark of a weak or diseased rather than of a strong and healthy will. Decision and strength of character is shown in the choice of certain fixed lines of conduct in such particulars, and in the abiding by the choice once made. But, inasmuch as the surrender of such activities to mechanism is itself a free act, we can reclaim them, if we will, from its dominion. In other words, the force of habit can be broken, however gradually; the spirit can reassert its power, and, even in such actions, make a new beginning.

(2.) The continuity of the moral life also implies a large surrender of its several acts to mechanism or habit. The moral life is not a series of isolated choices. Choices "crystallise,"

or rather they are seeds which develop and bear fruit in the days and years that follow. The spirit gives these large commissions to habit, and leaves to it their execution. The moments of our life have not all an equal moral significance. Rather the significance of our lives, for good or evil, seems to be determined by moments of choice in days and years of even tenor. The commission of which I have spoken is quickly given, its execution takes long. The moral crises of our lives are few, and soon over; but it seems as if all the strength of our spirit gathered itself up for such supreme efforts, and as if what follows in the long-drawn years were but *their* consequence.

(3.) What is generally called "fixity of character" suggests another important modification and limitation of the conception of freedom. The course of moral activity, as it goes on, seems to result in the establishment of certain fixed lines of conduct and character, whether good or evil. Of this gradual and almost imperceptible fixation in evil ways, the characters of Tito in George Eliot's 'Romola' and of Markheim in Mr R. L. Stevenson's little story of that name, are impressive instances. What is exemplified in such cases is not, I think, *loss* of will-power so much

as "fixity" of character—itself the creation of will—degradation of the will, a choice, apparently final and irrevocable, of the lower and the evil. This is the tragedy of the story in either case. Is not this again the meaning of the weird Faust legend which has so impressed the imagination of Europe? Faust's "selling his soul" to Mephistopheles, and signing the contract with his life's blood, is no single transaction, done deliberately, on one occasion; rather that is the lurid meaning of a life which consists of innumerable individual acts,—the life of evil *means* that. And, at the other extreme of the moral scale, does not "holiness" mean a great and final exaltation of will, its perfect and established union with the higher and the good, "fixity of character" once more? These infinite possibilities of evil and of goodness seem to be the implicate of an infinite moral ideal; they are the moral equivalents of the heaven and hell of the religious mind. What is Will itself but just this power or possibility, infinite as our nature, for each of us in the direction either of goodness or of evil? Between these extremes moves the ordinary average life of the comfortable citizen. The strongest and deepest natures are the saints and the sinners; the weaker and more superficial

fluctuate irresolute between the poles of moral life.

Whether the identification of the will with evil can ever become, in the strict sense, fixed, is a hard and perhaps unanswerable question. The Faust legend seems to express such a belief, and for Tito, as for Esau, there is "no place left for repentance." In the impressive little story of 'Markheim,' I think I see a gleam of hope, a suggestion and no more, of the final possibility, even for the most debased, of moral recovery. That last act of deliberate self-surrender seems like the first step away from the evil past towards a better future. It was the last possibility of good for the man; but even for him it was a possibility still. And does it not seem as if an evil character, however evil, being the formation of Will, might be *unformed* and *reformed* by the same power? Is not character, after all, but a garment in which the spirit clothes itself, a garment which clings tightly to it, but which it need not wear eternally?

But, on the side of goodness at any rate, the moral experience of which "fixity of character" is the natural interpretation, brings home to us the truth which, in our anxiety to vindicate freedom, we are so apt to forget, that freedom itself, as it

is generally understood, is not the ultimate or highest category of our life. The condition and attribute of the highest life is not to hold one's self aloof from good and evil, and "free" to choose between them. Far rather it is found in the "single mind," in the resolute identification of the whole man or self with the good, in the will of the higher self to live ; in what Plato, equally with the Christian theologian, calls "conversion" or "the turning round of the eye of the soul, and with it, the whole soul, from darkness to light, from the perishing to the eternal." For, as Aristotle truly said, virtue is not virtue, until it has become a habit of the soul, and easy and spontaneous as a habit. Moral progress is a progress from nature and its bondage, through freedom and duty, to that love or "second nature" which alone is the "fulfilling of the law." So that "after all, free-will is not the highest freedom." Free-will implies antagonism and resistance. "But the action of the perfect, so far as they are perfect, is *natural*. . . . Only it proceeds from a *higher nature*, in which experience has passed through reason into insight, in which impulse and desire have passed through free-will into love."¹ This is freedom made perfect, the liberty of the children

¹ G. A. Simcox, in 'Mind,' iv. 481.

of God. It consists in the entire surrender of the human will to the divine, in such a surrender as does not mean the loss of human personality, but rather its perfect fulfilment and realisation in the identification of man's will with the Will of God.

✓ I may sum up briefly the results of the inquiry now concluded. Finding that freedom and personality are ultimately one, I accept personality as an ultimate metaphysical conception, like the conceptions of God and the world. As all physical "explanations" are explanations of phenomena *within* the world, and not of the *world itself*, as the notion of a "world" or "cosmos" is a presupposition both of science and philosophy, so do all moral "explanations," as I think, presuppose the conception of moral personality. These are supreme categories which include all others, and are not themselves included. With God, they are the three constitutive metaphysical realities. And as Theology takes God, and the Philosophy of Nature takes the World, so must Moral Philosophy take Personality (and with it Freedom) as its supreme and guiding conception.

The final task of Metaphysics, as the highest and total synthesis, is to exhibit these in their

relations to one another, or, more strictly, to exhibit nature and human personality in their relation to the divine unity. But even Metaphysics must beware of *merging* any of these factors of ultimate reality in the others, or losing the distinctions between them. Its task is, while preserving the distinctive character of each, to accomplish their reconciliation, and to see them in their real unity. I have insisted, therefore, upon the integrity of the moral personality: with that, it seems to me, freedom stands or falls. That integrity may be tampered with, as we have found, in either of two ways. Man may be de-personalised either into Nature or into God. The former is the favourite course of recent Determinism, and I have given my reasons for dissenting from it. The greater danger lies, perhaps, in the other direction; and it was here that Edwards and the older Determinists, with a truer metaphysical instinct than their successors, waged the keenest warfare. The relation of man as a free moral personality to God is even more difficult to conceive than his relation to Nature. To think of God as all in all, and yet to retain our hold on human freedom or personality, that is the real metaphysical difficulty. The ultimate reconciliation of divine

and human personality may well be beyond us ; but I do not see how either conception can be given up, whether for a religious Mysticism or for an absolute philosophical Idealism. After all, the chief guarantee of a worthy view of God is a worthy view of man. It is through the conviction of his own superiority to Nature, of his own essential dignity and independence as a moral person, that man reaches the conception of One infinitely greater than himself. To resolve the integrity of his personality even into that of God, would be to negate the divine greatness itself, by invalidating the conception through which it was reached. We must, indeed, think of our life and destiny, as like the course and destiny of the worlds, ultimately in God's hands, and not in our own. If man is an "imperium," he is only an "*imperium in imperio*." The classical conception of Fate and the Christian thought of a divine Providence have high metaphysical warrant. All human experience

"Should teach us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

Yet man cannot regard himself as a mere instrument in the divine hands, a passive vehicle

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Freedom as Ethical Postulate.

of the energy of God ; he must think of himself as a co-worker, able to identify himself with the Divine Purpose in his life and in the universe, and, by such active identification, to make that Purpose his own. This is his high human birthright, which he may not sell.

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